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PRESS RELEASE

YOUNG WOMEN LEADERS FROM KHATLON WITNESS U.S. DEMOCRACY FIRST-HAND AT U.S. PRESIDENTIAL RALLY IN IOWA

Dushanbe, Tajikistan. On September 27, 2007 ten young women leaders from the Khatlon region returned from a twenty-day training and cultural exchange in the United States, including a once-in-a-lifetime chance to meet U.S. presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. The participants were selected in an open competition based on their leadership potential and openness to new ideas. The trip was made possible through the Community Connections program funded by USAID.

During their stay in Ames, Iowa the group of women leaders from Tajikistan met with many American women leaders, among them the heads of corporations, NGOs, the governor of Iowa and the mayor of Ames. Members of the group said it was an eye-opening experience to learn that governors and officials are elected in the U.S., not appointed.

Lyubov Oimuhammedova was impressed after meeting U.S. presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. "Barack Obama was so open, eloquent and persuasive that he won my heart," said Oimuhammedova at a press briefing on September 27. She heads a local NGO project fighting violence against women in Kurgan-Tube.

Gulmo Ibrohimova, head of a collective farm in the Vose district visited farmers in Iowa and brought seed samples to plant back home. Ibrohimova says she "hopes that poor rural women of my village will benefit from skills and knowledge I gained in the U.S."

The group returned with a large stock of new ideas and skills to help women of the Khatlon region. To help focus their efforts, the ten participants developed six-month action plans. The Iowa Resource for International Service, who hosted the group, has offered to help implement these plans any way they can.

The Community Connections Program provides an important opportunity for citizens of the United States and Tajikistan to work together to address common professional challenges while expanding their social and cultural understanding. As business and professional communities of both countries rapidly become integrated, opportunities for positive relations between American people and the people of Tajikistan are increasingly important. The Community Connections Program offers community-based, three-to-five week practical trainings in the United States for business and professional organization leaders from Tajikistan.

The Community Connections Program is one of the many assistance projects implemented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on behalf of the American people in Tajikistan. Since 1992 the American people through USAID have provided more than \$270 million in assistance programs that support economic growth, democratic institutions, health care, and education systems of Tajikistan.

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